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ABSTRACT

The key element for survival in today's technological society is the family and the role it plays in the education of its members. Educational attainments are closely linked to family background; not only for children, but for adults as well. Children tend to gain levels of education similar to, if not higher than those of family heads, and educational levels appear to be transferable from parent to child. The higher the educational level of parents, the higher are the achievements of their children. In addition, it has been found that the mother's influence is particularly important in educational level attained by children, and that persons with higher education are more likely than others to have time to help children with homework. A mail survey of a random sample of 900 adults 25 years of age and older enrolled as full-time undergraduates at four midwestern universities (68 percent return) was conducted to elicit data on family influence on the decision of adult students to enroll in full-time higher education. The adults who responded to this study were very emphatic about the support that family members provided them in the way of encouragement, moral support, and acceptance by the academic community. Fifty-two percent of women students reported receiving support in the sharing of household duties from husbands and children. Students also reported gaining self-confidence, ability to deal more adequately with family problems, new insights, new careers, and, for women, better rapport with husbands and children as a result of participation in higher education. (KC)

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The Family As Role Model
For Educating Its Members:
Childhood Through Adulthood

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The Family As Role Model For Educating Its Members: Childhood Through Adulthood

Education and Family Backgrounds:

The key element for survival in today's technological society is the family and the role it plays in the education of its members. Educational attainments are closely linked to family background; not only for children, but for adults as well. Children tend to gain levels of education similar to; if not higher than those of family heads, and educational levels appear to be transferable from parent to child. The higher the educational level of parents, the higher are the achievements of their children (4:1-3).

Families are the center of children's learning environment. Children are influenced by the people with whom they are most closely associated: parents, siblings, extended family and friends. Parsons (15:25,87), in his studies on the family socialization process, says that the value system, of which education is a part, is inculcated in all children by the family. Cropley (6:3-5, 89) takes this idea one step further and says that the family is the most powerful agency society has which guides, modifies, and develops the child psychologically and educationally. Eisendrath (8:5) first mentions the effect of family living on later adult years by stating that children are inculcated with the values and patterns of family living, and as youth may be discontented, but as adults, transmit these values to their own children. The importance of the family in transmitting the values of education, even though it may be years after the child leaves home, cannot be overstressed. Nolen (14:51-75), on the other hand, sees the family as a life decision-making unit, and that the benefits of women's education may be a superior home investment in the human capital of children. This agrees with the research of Niemi. Niemi who found that families involved with relating family goals, needs and attitudes have clear implications for the adult learner's decision-making process. Serious decisions pertaining to education, careers, marriage, and retirement are family decisions, subsequently educational choices and plans for further education are to be a great extent influenced by parents education, cultural level and family tradition. Gadlin (10:305-328), says that the key to understanding childhood within the family is the key to understanding adult life.

Socialization is a lifelong process and becomes a cumulative process as a result of individual learning experiences. White (20:6) divides the process into two phases: primary, taking place in early childhood and secondary, taking place in the lifetime of the adult.

This socialization process not only is prevalent in Western societies, the United States and England, but is prevalent in the Soviet Union, according to Zyugin (23:11). He points out that 10 percent of university students in the USSR are from agricultural families and 82 percent are from professional families who have a heritage of education in the family.

The ideas of Nolen (14) that women's education may be a superior investment in the human capital of children, and that the wealthy or educated devote more time to the education of their children, is further elaborated on by Bowen (3:196). He lists eight variables in which he describes the value of education to the family. The most important of these are: Higher education in the family increases achievement by children, and the college educated devote more time, money and energy to the rearing of their children.

What does the future hold for children and their development to young adults today? The Christian Science Monitor, in a research series, "When Mothers Work" (19)(4), found that one-third of 44 million school-age children have mothers who work. These children are in day-care centers, go to industry-sponsored nurseries or day-care centers or are latch-key children who fend for themselves without the supervision of a father or mother. In the near future 11 million more women are expected to enter the U.S. labor force. There is a question of who is responsible for these children; is it a parental problem, a government problem or problem of the industries who hire women? How are children to experience a sense of love from those tending to their needs in the hours spent away from home? Children need to feel valued, loved, watched over and supported; qualities they normally receive and feel at home with their family. The present non-support of government for day-care centers goes back to the administration of Richard Nixon, when he vetoed government-supported day-care centers, because: Government should not support a communal approach to child rearing. He called for efforts to cement the family in its rightful position as the keystone of our civilization (5:35).

Research on the importance of the family in influencing the education of its members is primarily found in the literature of early childhood and adolescence. Research on the effect of early education on family members and its long-term influence for adults is scarce.

Essert and Spence (9:260-271), in their study of the community education system, found that of three major systems prevailing in the community, the family education system is the major educational institution in any culture. It provides 1) for finding ways of replacing educational functions previously provided for the aged and, 2) how to educate the adult members so they in turn may educate their children. Essert and Spence also found that the family needs to be helped to be more directly involved in its educational impact on its members. Dickinson (7:36-47), using Essert and Spence's model of education in the community, studied over 500 farm families and found that education in the family increased with the increased schooling of the father, but the greatest influence on participating was the educational level of the wife or mother. The research of Dickinson is supported by a study conducted by Alleyne and Verneer (2), when they observed a relationship between the wife's education and husband's use and adoption of new farm practices.

Converse to the findings of Essert and Spence, Dickinson, Niemi and Niemi; Hopper and Osborne (11:96) found that in England parents were less likely to support adult students as compared to support provided to traditional college

age students. This reinforces the concept of cultural values and education, and points out the importance that the American family plays in the education of its children and lifelong education for adults.

The Changing Trend in Education

The trends in education are changing as adults are breaking the barriers which formerly dictated that higher education was for those young adults of traditional college age, that is 18-22 years of age. Barriers have been broken by parents and young adults and have provided the incentives for other family members to seek higher education. This is not only true in the realm of education, but also of occupation; historically, occupations follow a class line, in which the son follows the occupation of the father or similar work. Aberle and Kaspar (1:366), in a study on fathers who came from backgrounds and occupations lower than they were presently occupying, envisioned an equal or higher status for their sons.

Adults have come to realize that there is a rapid change in society which generates new types of production, and places new demands on skills (and attitudes toward the job market place. They further find that in order to cope with these new demands, further education is required. This change is described by White (20:6) as secondary socialization, and unless adults change with the trends their productive lifetimes are shortened; eventually they become nonproductive.

To adopt to the changing society, young or middle-age adults must be willing to consider changes in their career or adopt second careers. These may necessitate a willingness to participate in formal education beyond what they recently or many years ago completed. Skager (16:4) states: "Education becomes the primary social tool for promoting individual growth and self-realization."

Adults with family support soon discover that they can learn, are educable, and have the necessary motivation for self-improvement to learn new skills, and are able to recognize the value of new learning, both for themselves, and their family. This follows the precepts of Skager (17:89), that lifelong education is elective, inclusive, and founded on egalitarian values.

Adults today for the first time are being sought by universities to fill the declining enrollment of young traditional-age college students. The 25 year-old and older population will grow due to the low birthrate as the 18-22 year-old age group declines (18:1-6).

A survey by mail questionnaire was conducted by a random sample of 900 adults 25 years of age and older enrolled as full-time undergraduates at four mid-western land grant universities. The study's primary purpose was to elicit data on family influence on the decision of adult students to enroll in higher education as full-time undergraduates. There were 614 cases returned for a 68.2 percent return rate. For the purpose of this paper, only data pertaining

to the student, his children, and his family will be discussed. Other demographic data in reference to finding on adult students, their family, finances, use of university facilities, high school versus college GPA's, and motivations may be found in the unpublished dissertation of the author (21) and in Perspectives in Adult Learning and Development (22).

Research Findings and Discussion

The changing trends in contemporary society, such as the single-parent family headed by a single male or female, the insistence by married couples that there is no single head of family (but a joint husband/wife head), created a need by the U.S. Census Bureau to list family heads as joint husband/wife. Table 1 reflects this trend, as nearly 100 percent of the married respondents marked this category.

TABLE 1
Who is Head of the Family

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
Single does not apply	196	31.9
Single head/mother	37	6.0
Joint husband/wife	303	49.3
Husband	50	8.1
Single head/father	10	1.6
Wife	<u>2</u>	<u>0.3</u>
VALID CASES	598	97.4
No response (missing cases)	16	2.6
TOTAL	<u>614</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Parental support played an important role in students decisions to obtain a higher education degree. 71.6 percent of parents thought it was important for their son or daughter to obtain a degree.

TABLE 2
Parents

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
Not very important	75	12.2
Fairly important	187	30.5
Quite important	165	26.9
Extremely important	87	14.2
Not certain of their attitude	<u>67</u>	<u>10.0</u>
VALID CASES	581	94.6
No response (missing cases)	33	5.4
TOTAL	<u>614</u>	<u>100.0</u>

In view of the number of single students in the study and the low number of children of students in the study, it was significant that 50 percent of the respondents thought it important that their attending a university provided a role model for their own children.

TABLE 3
Role Model for Children

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
Very important	113	18.4
Somewhat important	93	15.1
Important	102	16.6
Not important	95	15.5
Cannot judge importance	168	27.4
VALID CASES	571	93.0
No response (missing cases)	43	7.0
TOTAL	614	100.0

Parallel to those providing a role model, there were an equal number of respondents who demonstrated the value of education to children by obtaining a degree. Fifty-two percent of the respondents attributed an importance to this.

TABLE 4
Demonstrate Value of Education to Children

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
Very important	118	19.2
Somewhat important	109	17.8
Important	93	15.1
Not important	87	14.2
Cannot judge importance	165	26.9
VALID CASES	572	93.2
No response (missing cases)	42	6.8
TOTAL	614	100.0

Members of the family who were influential in the decision to obtain a degree were elicited from the respondent's parents, siblings, and friends. For the purpose of this paper, only the finding on the mother, father, and spouse are shown. For brothers and sisters, the first brother and sister were highly influential, but not as influential as the spouse, mother, and father. As noted, the spouse and mother were highly influential, which substantiates the finding of Essert and Spence, and Nolen on the influence of mothers and wives.

TABLE 5

Father Influence

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
1	81	13.2
2	86	14.0
3	64	10.4
4	53	8.6
5	56	9.1
6	40	6.5
7	11	1.8
8	13	2.1
9	73	11.9
VALID CASES	477	77.7
No response (missing cases)	137	22.3
TOTAL	614	100.0

TABLE 6

Mother Influence

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
1	71	11.6
2	90	14.7
3	103	16.8
4	70	11.4
5	53	8.6
6	26	4.2
7	18	2.9
8	11	1.8
9	61	9.9
VALID CASES	503	81.9
No response (missing cases)	111	18.1
TOTAL	614	100.0

TABLE 7
Spouse Influence

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
1	172	28.0
2	59	9.6
3	31	5.0
4	18	2.9
5	26	4.2
6	12	2.0
7	7	1.1
8	10	1.6
9	<u>61</u>	<u>9.9</u>
VALID CASES	396	64.5
No response (missing cases)	<u>218</u>	<u>35.5</u>
TOTAL	<u>614</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Students were questioned how attendance at a higher education institution has affected their family life. On a series of true/false responses, over 55 percent of the respondents state they gained self confidence to deal with family problems.

TABLE 8
Given Me More Self Confidence to Deal
with Problems in the Family

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
True	339	55.2
False	<u>178</u>	<u>29.0</u>
VALID CASES	517	84.2
No response (missing cases)	97	<u>15.8</u>
TOTAL	<u>614</u>	<u>100.0</u>

"Family respects me more as a person is interesting as over 50 percent answered true to this statement. This correlates with increased self confidence."

TABLE 9

Family Respects Me More as a Person

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
True	317	51.6
False	<u>211</u>	<u>34.4</u>
VALID CASES	528	86.0
No response (missing cases)	<u>86</u>	<u>14.0</u>
TOTAL	<u>614</u>	<u>100.0</u>

An item that has wide interest and is not in agreement with other studies on married students is the expectation that going to school, especially for married females, does not relieve the student from both home and school responsibilities. Over 52 percent of the respondents stated they are not expected to carry both responsibilities.

TABLE 10

Family Expects Me to Carry Both Home and School
Responsibilities Without Change

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
True	219	35.7
False	<u>325</u>	<u>52.9</u>
VALID CASES	544	88.6
No response (missing cases)	<u>70</u>	<u>11.4</u>
TOTAL	<u>614</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Tables 11 and 12 are two important findings for the adult student. By an overwhelming margin, respondents state that their family does not resent them for going to school; concurrently, an overwhelming number state their families support and help them.

TABLE 11

Family Resents Me Going To School

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
True	26	4.2
False	<u>539</u>	<u>87.8</u>
VALID CASES	565	92.0
No response (missing cases)	<u>49</u>	<u>8.0</u>
TOTAL	<u>614</u>	<u>100.0</u>

TABLE 12

Family Supports and Helps Me

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
True	493	80.3
False	<u>81</u>	<u>13.2</u>
VALID CASES	574	93.5
No response (missing cases)	<u>40</u>	<u>6.5</u>
TOTAL	<u>614</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Respondents who received parental assistance with homework appeared to follow the national trend. Assistance is correlated with the educational level of parents. Those parents with the most education appear to find more time to assist their children with their homework. In a recent survey by Galley Poll for CBS News, most parents indicated they have enough time to devote to helping their children with homework. But one-third said they did not help with homework. The proportion of parents who indicated that they lack time varied by educational background. Those with less education said they have less time. Almost half of the parents with only a grade school education indicated they could not devote enough time to assisting with their child's homework. Only one-fourth of college-educated parents cited a lack of time. This correlates with the finding of the study.

TABLE 13

Parental Assistance with Homework

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
Often	71	11.6
Sometimes	238	38.8
Seldom	212	34.5
Never	87	14.2
VALID CASES	608	99.0
No response (missing cases)	6	1.0
TOTAL	614	100.0

Table 14 reflects family members who help most with the homework. The mother is overwhelmingly predominant and substantiates the finding of Essert and Spence, and Nolen that the mother/wife is the primary family educator.

TABLE 14

Family Members Who Assisted with Homework

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
Father	141	23.0
Mother	251	40.9
Brother/Sister	53	8.6
Friends	55	9.0
Other	18	2.9
VALID CASES	518	84.4
No response (missing cases)	96	15.6
TOTAL	614	100.0

Respondents providing homework assistance for their own children appear to be minimal. But when examined from the perspective that the respondent group had few children, and mostly young, the number who replied in the affirmative is significant.

TABLE 15

Homework Assistance Provided to Respondents' Children

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency %</u>
Often	58	9.4
Sometimes	83	13.5
Seldom	16	2.6
Never	4	0.7
VALID CASES	161	26.2
No response (missing cases)	453	73.8
TOTAL	614	100.0

Discussion

The adults who responded to this study were very emphatic on the support that family members provided them in the way of encouragement, moral support, and acceptance by the academic community. It must be noted that approximately 70 percent of the respondents had previous college experience, dropped out and returned to school as full-time undergraduates, and were 25 years of age or older at the time they participated in the study.

Adults continue to initiate and return to higher education and are fast becoming a large segment of the higher education scene, as reflected in the U.S. Census Report (18). Women, especially, are turning to higher education in large numbers and are receiving support, in the way of sharing household duties, from husbands and children. Current literature describes the adult as gaining self-confidence, ability to deal more adequately with family problems, new insights, new careers, and better rapport with husbands and children as a result of participation in higher education. These goals also were realized by the 1979 respondent group.

In a correlated study by the California State University on successful reentry experience, more than three-fourths of women sampled feel that the college experience has been worth it and expanded their employment opportunities. There were 96 percent who felt going back to school had been worth it in terms of personal growth. Another survey showed that 92 percent of women sampled reported increased self-confidence as a direct result of returning to school (16).

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